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2000
LEGEND OF THE HAWKMAN

Hawkman Takes Wing Again

For a hero who first spread his wings sixty years ago, Hawkman is looking pretty chipper. This summer, he's set to soar again in an all-new limited series, a hardcover compilation of his earliest Silver Age tales, a reprinting of his first Golden Age appearance—and if that's not enough, he'll also be hitting the toy racks!

For fans of the winged wonder, the biggest new is the return of the Hawks in a prestige-format limited series, ***Legend of the Hawkman.*** Written by *Ben Raab* and illustrated by *Michael Lark*, this series—set during Hawkman's first year on earth—explores the Thanagarian hero's fascination with Earth.

"It's the Hawks' first year on Earth," Raab explained, "and Katar and Shayera are at a crossroads in their relationship. He wants to stay here and continue working as a museum curator; she misses her friends and family and wants to return to Thanagar. Before they can come to an agreement, destiny comes a'callin' in the form of an ancient Thanagarian crypt hewn into the side of a mountain in the Himalayas. Within that crypt, a demon of yore: the 'Fallen One,' Thasaro. Suddenly, everything our heroes know about themselves and each other is put to the test as they must defend two worlds, two homes, from the greatest evil their ancestors had ever known."

But *which* Katar and Shayera does ***Legend of the Hawkman*** focus on? After all, the hero has gone through a number of transformations over the years. "Without a doubt, it's the *Gardner Fox/Joe Kubert* version," Raab said—the same version that's featured in the ***Hawkman Archives*** volume also slated for summer release. "Theirs are the stories I enjoy most, and they were definitely my inspiration to want to write these two amazing characters and add to the foundation laid by such comics giants."

Just as was the case in in those Silver Age tales, Raab's Hawkman story plays up the Thanagarian's detective side—and his interest in ancient Earth weapons. " It just wouldn't be the same Silver Age Hawks without those key elements," Raab said. And, in the Gardner Fox tradition, he researched the weapons that he used in the story "so I could include some historical facts. Like Hawkgirl's javelin, for instance" I threw in a little backstory to give a more personal reason why she would choose to use that particular weapon most frequently. It's a little something I hope the fans will appreciate."

Will any of the classic Hawkman villains from those early days make an appearance in the story? "There's a flashback page in issue two where we showcase a few old favorites," Raab said, "as well as a brief cameo appearance from a certain fellow alien..."

Surprisingly, considering the story's focus on Silver Age elements, Raab's Hawkman relationship doesn't go back anywhere nearly as far as the early sixties, when the Fox-Kubert Hawkman debuted in the pages of ***The Brave and the Bold.*** "The first time I ever saw Hawkman was on the cover of an issue of I where he and Superman are going toe-to-toe with each other in the skies above Paris. Man, I thought was just the coolest thing *ever*! I mean, this guy was going punch for punch with the *Man of Steel*! Who the hell can do *that*? From that point on, I was hooked. Much as I like the 'Big Three' (Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman), for some reason I've always been more interested in DC's 'supporting' characters, like Aquaman, Green Arrow, etc. Hawkman and Hawkgirl have topped that list for a *long* time." And what is it that makes Hawkman so enduring? "It's all in the *wings*, baby! "

Raab's limited series didn't actually begin as a limited series at all; its origins were far more humble. "It was 5pm on a Thursday afternoon, March 1999. Having just received the approval for my ***X-Me3n: Hellfire Club*** limited series a few days earlier, I was in pretty high spirits. On a whim, I sat down and starting spitting out some ideas about a potential two-part ***Legends of the DC Universe*** story starring the Silver Age Hawkman and Hawkgirl. Eight hours and an entire pot of black coffee, later, I had a proposal ready for submission.

"I emailed it to DC Executive Editor *Mike Carlin* and went to bed, expecting to wake up the next morning to a response saying, 'Thanks for the submission, but we're not doing anything with those characters these days.' Instead, what I got was, 'I'm thinking *Michael Lark* would be perfect for this!' Without a doubt, the *fastest* approval I've ever seen for any of my writing submissions.

"Little did I realize that synchronicity was working in my favor. DC already had plans to publish a Silver Age ***Hawkman Archives***, as well as produce a Hawkman and Hawkgirl action figure set. 2000 was shaping up to be the Year of the Hawk for them, and my humble little proposal miraculously fit into the plan.

"The story was originally going to be printed in issues #26 & 27 of ***Legends of the DC Universe***, but Carlin suggested I keep the story open-ended on the off-chance that they might want to revisit the story in the future. By the time I had finished the second part, a decision was made to combine those two parts into a single prestige-format issue, followed by two subsequent chapters. Hence, the three-issue limited series that's about to hit the stands.

"I suppose in the final analysis, I owe this prestigious limited series to good timing, dumb luck, and far more coffee than any human being should consume in one sitting. So, what's the moral of the story, kiddies? Start mainlining caffeine and all *your* dreams can come true, too!"

Michael Lark is the artist who's been tapped to follow in the footsteps of such talents as *Joe Kubert, Murphy Anderson,* and *Tim Truman* in supplying the visuals for Hawkman's exploits. "I know Michael is very much inspired by his predecessors and has tried his damnedest to put that inspiration down on paper while still retaining his own unique style," Raab said. "He's got a great, classic style, and I couldn't think of anyone more masterful and deserving to inherit the torch carried by Kubert and Anderson."

The three-issue prestige-format miniseries is certain to be welcome by Hawkman fans—and equally welcome is the news that plans are already in the works to bring Hawkman back in an active role in the DC Universe later this year. "I know *Geoff Johns* and *David Goyer* have plans to bring some incarnation of Hawkman into the ***JSA***, but whether or not they'll play off anything established in my series is totally up to them. As for this new Hawkman someday getting his own series? That all depends on the fans' response. Personally, I can't wait to see what they've got planned. It's about time Hawkman soared the skies of the DCU again!"

DC kicks off the Hawkman relaunch in late June, with the release of the ***Hawkman/ Hawkgirl Deluxe Action Figure Set.*** This $29.95 two-figure set depicts the winged wonders in their full glory, complete with weapon accessories. Then, on July 19th, Hawkman flies again in two different guises. The original Golden Age Hawkman is featured in ***Millennium Edition Flash Comics #1***, a 64-page reprint of the 1940 classic that also featured the first appearance of the Flash and Johnny Thunder. Then the Silver Age Hawkman is featured in updated form in ***Legend of the Hawkman #1***, a $4.95 48-page comic. A week later, it's the Silver Age all over again, thanks to the 240-page $49.95 ***Hawkman Archives Volume One***, which reprints all six ***Brave and Bold*** issues (#s 34-36 and 42-44) by *Gardner Fox* and *Joe Kubert*, as well as the *Gardner Fox-Murphy Anderson* Hawkman tales from ***Mystery in Space #s 87-90***—and Hawkman's first teamup with *Adam Strange, courtesy of Gardner Fox, Carmine Infantino,* and *Murphy Anderson.*

by Cliff Biggers

The Mark of Zero

Who investigates things that don't officially exist—things like UFOs, lost civilizations, time travel, ancient gods, and extant dinosaurs? Well, who's better equipped for that job than a team that doesn't exist?

Welcome to the world of ***Section Zero***, the team that the United Nations will never confirm. After all, they're never mentioned in the UN Charter... or at least, they're never mentioned in the part of the charter that the public has seen. But these experts in the unusual are very real, as fans will discover in June, when ***Section Zero #1*** makes it debut.

Karl Kesel and *Tom Grummett*, the team responsible for some of the most memorable Superboy stories in recent years, has joined forces again for the launch of this new Gorilla Comics series; they're joined by colorist *Ben Dimagmaliw*, best known for his eye-catching work on ***League of Extraordinary Gentlemen***.

The book focuses on the undercover activities of Section Zero, the team headed by scientific genius Doc Challenger, a woman who knows that what the world believes and what is actually true can be two very different things. Her most trusted operative is soldier-of-fortune Sam Wildman; together, they and their team of agents investigate things that don't officially exist... but can have quite an impact on the world nevertheless.

Section Zero #1, a $2.50 comic, is scheduled for mid-June release. The first issue will also include a special five-page prequel of ***Tellos*** by *Todd Dezago* and *Mike Wieringo*, which joins the Gorilla line-up in July.

by Alex Kirkland

Courtesy of your Friendly Neighborhood Comics Outlet!

CSNSIDER

ORDWAY JOINS THE JLA!

A few weeks back, ***CSNsider*** told readers about *Stan Lee*'s landmark twelve-book project for DC Comics. As we reported then, Stan Lee has been invited by DC to reinterpret the heroes and heroines of the DC Universe, presenting them as they might have appeared had Stan Lee created—or recreated—these characters rather than the Marvel heroes back in the early days of the Silver Age.

Now there's an artist associated with one of these projects—and what an artist! " I am committed to doing the JLA book for the *Stan Lee* project," *Jerry Ordway* told CSNsider, "though it's still a ways off. I understand they are introducing the solo heroes first, and will probably cull a team from that. As for specifics, I know nothing.

"I'm really excited to part of the project, and hope I can justify *Mike Carlin*'s faith in choosing me for this. Stan has been a hero of mine since I first discovered Marvel comics as a kid, and I met with him a few years back to discuss being part of his separate imprint at Marvel, which never came about. I also drew a portion of ***Fantastic Four #296***, which Stan dialogued, but look forward to the whole writer experience this time!"

Ordway's been a very busy man, working on The Messenger for Image (which he is both writing and illustrating), which ties in to a new Ordway series debuting in the near future. "A few supporting characters in ***Messenger*** will also appear in ***Proton***, which I envision as a four issue miniseries," Ordway said. So when will Proton see print? "As soon as financially feasible. With a wife and three children, I can't afford to finance this book in one chunk. I'll be squeezing it in between paying assignments and won't solicit anything until I have at least two issues done."

Ordway is keeping himself busy at Marvel as well. "I'm working on a still secret project for *Tom Brevoort*, with *Kurt Busiek*, called ***Maximum Security***, which ships in September. That's all I can say for now, though, as Tom is holding my comic collection hostage, and threatens to —oh, I'm just kidding! He wouldn't *dare* harm my Marvels—I need them for reference!"

CSN

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Editors
Cliff Biggers & Ward Batty

A CRYPTIC ANNOUNCEMENT

Phil Hester and *Mike Huddleston* have a serious undertaking in the works, and they've taken it to Oni Press! ***The Coffin***, a bimonthly four issue limited series slated to debut in September, tells the story of Ashar Ahmad, a scientist who has created a technologically advanced suit that can keep the soul alive after the body has died. When things take a bad turn, Ashar himself becomes the first guinea pig to test the outfit in order to save his life. It works, but Ashar finds himself neither dead nor alive, trapped inside the coffin of his own design high tech coffin of his own design.

"This is a different kind of book for Oni," Hester said. "We weren't quite sure what they would think of it at first. It combines standard conventions of superhero, sci-fi, horror, and cyberpunk-genres Oni isn't necessarily known for. We thought it had enough of a twist, though, for it to fit neatly on their roster."

'I saw character designs sitting on the desk of our editor in chief, and Mike's drawing immediately grabbed my attention," Oni publisher *Joe Nozemack* said. "I snatched it from him and sat down and read the proposal. I was delighted that it wasn't just another empty concept with a cool visual. Phil and Mike had come up with an excellent story, one with a lot of character and mind-bending concepts. The Coffin was one of those projects that I knew straight away that we had to do."

Hester and Huddleston's approach to comic art is different from the usual pencil-and-ink style. Hester does the layouts, while Huddleston does the final pen-and-ink art, then scans the art into a computer, where he adds grey tones and other art effects.

"The book takes place in the future, and I wanted it to look that way," Huddleston said. "I wanted to create a black-and-white style that would set ***The Coffin*** apart from the other independent comics on the racks. It's the job of the visuals to suck the reader in and compel them to give the book a read, so I wanted to make sure that once you saw the art, it would be impossible to put the book down."

HORSE PUT TO PASTURE

After almost two decades of comics excellence, Dark Horse Comics' superlative anthology series ***Dark Horse Presents*** is coming to an end in September with ***DHP #157***. "Over the past two years I've tried everything I could think of to boost sales of the comic back to a level at which the series could support itself, to no avail," said editor *Randy Stradley*, who admitted that he had mixed feelings about the cancellation.

"On the one hand I look forward to the extra time I'll have in my schedule. (Don't ever let anybody tell you that short stories are easier than full-length stories. An eight-page story requires just as much time to nurture, edit, traffic through the production stage as a twenty-odd page story. Then do that three or four times each month.)

"On the other hand, it's difficult to part with something that you started from nothing and built into what our marketing department dubbed 'the award-winningest anthology in comics'. But all the awards in the world won't pay the bills, and it's time to face the fact that times have changed. The market and the series – and probably my own sensibilities and tastes – no longer share enough common ground to keep the series afloat.

"Still, there were some damn fine issues in the run, and I'm proud to have been a part of them." And Stradley has every reason to be proud—after all, ***Dark Horse Presents*** has introduced such creations as Concrete, Black Cross, Nevermen, Earth Boys (okay, we're biased—that one was written by ***CSN***'s own *Cliff Biggers* and *Brett Brooks*, along with artist *Dave Johnson*), and Sin City. Mark it down as one more bit of proof as to how hard it is to produce and sell an anthology book in today's marketplace.

MORE PAGES JUST FOR 'KICKS

Fanboy Entertainment's new series ***Sidekicks*** hasn't debuted yet, but response to the ***Sidekicks Preview Edition*** has been so overwhelmingly positive that *J Torres* and *Takeshi Miyazawa* have expanded the first issue from thirty-two to forty pages rather than trimming the kickoff story.

"J and Takeshi have a story to tell, and what a fabulous story it is!" Fanboy Entertainment's publisher *C.B. Cebulski* said. "The first issue was supposed to be thirty-two pages, but Takeshi ran a little wild and the book clocked in at thirty-five pages.

"What we originally planned, as was announced in an earlier press release, was that the eight pages originally seen in the ***Preview Edition*** were going to be removed and J. and Takeshi were going to rework the story with new art to make it shorter. But after the three of us got together in Chicago at Anime Central, plans changed. The previews were snatched up and the fan reaction was overwhelming. After reviewing all the original art for ***Sidekicks #1*** and trying to formulate a plan, we all agreed that book should be left as is, unchanged."

"I'd been pondering the expansion idea for a while, ever since J first informed me of the page crunch," Cebulski said. "I saw CrossGen came out and did the same thing recently. I've heard their actions received a really positive response from the fans and retailers, so we felt that there was no harm in our trying something similar. Eight more pages of story for the same price. Who's going to complain about *that*?"

One thing that will change before ***Sidekicks #1*** debuts, though, is the lettering. "Takeshi handlettered the eight page ***Sidekicks Preview Edition*** himself," Cebulski said. "Personally, I loved it. It was fun and original. However, reaction to it for the most part has been negative. It's about the *only* complaint we received about the book. Most people said they thought it was hard to read. But I guess that's a bonus benefit of having done the preview book. We've now gone back in and relettered the whole book to make it clearer and more legible."

Cebulski also announced that the book would feature alternate covers by a variety of guest artist, including *Kia Asamiya* (who will provide the alternate cover for the first issue), *Ed McGuinness* (second issue), and *Mike Wieringo* and *Keron Grant* (third issue).

UPCOMING COMICS—MARVEL IN AUGUST

Why does Senator Ward so dislike Detective Arthur Stacy? Why was Arthur willing to go so far as to kill Ward? There's a horrifying secret behind this conflict, and it's about to be revealed, beginning in ***Amazing Spider-Man #22***, written by *Howard Mackie* and illustrated by *John Romita Jr.* and *Scott Hanna*.

The fantasy rewrite of the Marvel Universe continues in ***Avataars: Covenant of the Shield #2***, courtesy of *Len Kaminski*, *Oscar Jimenez*, and *Eduardo Alpuente*. This time around, our heroes will venture into the Webwood, where they'll meet the X-Changlings and the Four Fates.

Phoenix and the Beast guest-star in ***Cable #84***. *Robert Weinberg* and *Michael Ryan* reveal the origin of the immortal Undying, the connection between this ancient race and mankind's future, and why it's all focused on Nathan Summers.

Doom de doom doom!... ***Doom #1***, written by *Chuck Dixon* and illustrated by *Leonardo Manco*, fills in the gaps between the events of ***Fantastic Four #25*** and ***Fantastic Four #30*** while offering new insights into the inner workings of the malevolent monarch.

The X-Men guest-star in ***Gambit 2000***, an extra-length tale that continues from the pages of ***Gambit #20***. Gambit leads Angel, Shadowcat, Colossus and Nightcrawler into the Crystal Cathedral to confront the mysterious man known as the New Son. This annual also includes a bonus tale featuring Gambit's father and a very strange guest star.

Paul Jenkins and *Jae Lee*'s hit Marvel maxiseries ***The Inhumans*** is compiled in trade paperback in August. This is the series that revitalized the Inhumans as a franchise.

CSNSIDER

Think you know all about Iron Man's origins? There may be a few surprises in store still, thanks to *Joe Quesada, Frank Tieri,* and *Dan Panosian*. ***Iron Man 2000*** not only wraps up the "Sons of Yin-Sen" storyline, but it also reveals hitherto-unknown secrets about the day Tony Stark first donned his famous suit of armor.

The earliest Iron Man adventures from ***Tales of Suspense*** are gathered in the 500+ page ***Essential Iron Man***. This black and white trade paperback follows Tony Stark's armor-clad adventures as told by *Stan Lee, Don Heck,* and *Gene Colan,* among others. The stories included here include the first appearances of Hawkeye, the Black Widow, the Mandarin.

Thor guest-stars in ***Marvel: The Lost Generation #5*** as the First Line trip to stop the Cult of Rumor from corrupting the youth of America. Thor's not by himself, either; it looks like there might be some chemistry between the Thunder God and Venus, the goddess of love!...

Big changes are in store for the mutant team in ***Mutant X #25***—but the seeds for the change are planted in ***Mutant X #24,*** written by *Howard Mackie* and illustrated by *Tom Lyle* and *Andrew Pepoy*. Havok and his fellow mutants get extra help from Hank McCoy as they take on the Master Planner, who's stealing children from the streets of New York City.

The Power Pack kids joining forces with a Snark? What could lead them to team up with their own enemy? And what effect will it have on the Power Pack team? Find out in ***Power Pack: Peer Pressure #3,*** courtesy of *Shon Bury, Colleen Doran,* and *Terry Austin*.

As ***Punisher #7*** begins, Frank Castle lies near death... and it appears that someone might have sold him out. The crime drama continues in the latest issue of this series by *Garth Ennis, Steve Dillon,* and *Jimmy Palmiotti*.

It's been the better part of twenty years since Rom waged his war against the Dire Wraiths... but it looks like the war wasn't completely won after all. In ***Spaceknights #1,*** written by the cosmically aware *Jim Starlin* and illustrated by *Chris Batista* and *Chip Wallace,* the Dire Wraiths are back, and it's up to the two sons of Rom—Tristan, the Liberator, and Balin, the Terminator—to carry on their father's legacy. They're joined by a new group of Space Knights, including Starshine, Pulsar, Firefall, Sentry, Hammerhead, Javelin, and Scanner.

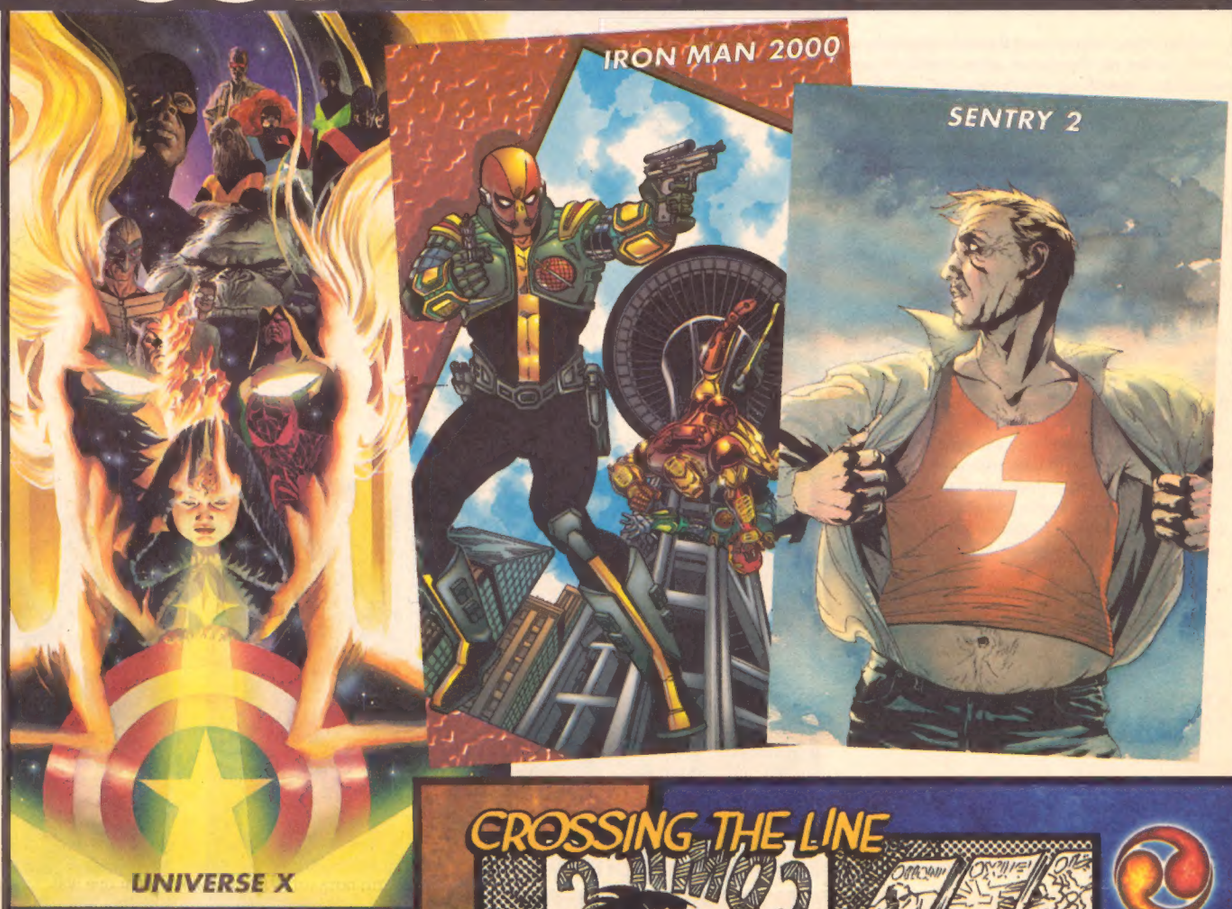
In ***Sentry #2,*** *Paul Jenkins* and *Jae Lee* bring up a lot of questions. Who is the Sentry? What is the Unicorn? As the man named Bob Reynolds slowly begins to grasp who and what he is, how can this object shed light on the secret of the Sentry? And what does it all have to do with Marvel's first family, the Fantastic Four?

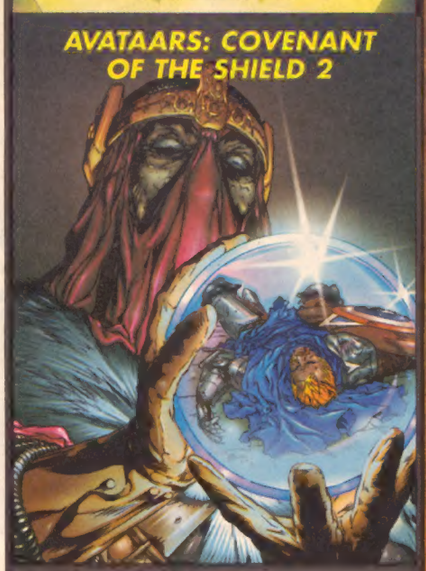
Norman Osborn's secrets will be revealed in ***Spider-Man: Revenge of the Green Goblin,*** a three-issue limited series by Roger Stern, Lee Weeks, and Richard Case. During the course of this tale, readers will learn what this fiendish foe has been up to since his escape from the sanitarium-and what his plans are for Peter Parker. And readers will also witness the surprisingly romantic side of the evil industrialist.

The Avengers/Thunderbolts crossover heats up in ***Thunderbolts #43*** as Black Widow pays a visit. Atlas has abducted Wonder Man, so the Thunderbolts decide to go right to the source of their troubles: the South American base of Baron Zemo. Meanwhile, over in the pages of ***Avengers #33,*** Count Nefaria is back, and the only hope the Avengers have for defeating him is locked in the mind of Madame Masque... but will she be willing to help the team against her own father? This story will lead into ***Thunderbolts #44*** in September.

Universe X is back in a big way in August. First, there's ***4: A Universe X Special*** by *Alex Ross, Jim Krueger,* and *Brent Anderson*. In this 48-page oneshot, Galactus, the Thing, Namor, Him, Alicia, Agatha Harkness, Dr. Strange, Commander Arcturus Rann, the Brothers Grimm, X-51 and a host of heroes and villains lost in the realm of the dead star in this all-new adventure. Then the action continues into ***Universe X #1,*** where Captain America and the resurrected Captain Mar-Vell begin their search while Reed Richards discovers that the Earth is on the brink of a biological armageddon. *Alex Ross and Jim Krueger* are joined by artist *Doug Braithwaite* for the second series set in this alternate reality.

Want to learn the truth about the X-Men, their mutant allies, and their enemies? Then ***X-Men: Declassified*** is the book for you! *Karl Bollers, Pascual Ferry,* and *J.H. Williams* present a compendium of the gathered knowledge on Charles Xavier and his mutants. Problem is, some of the information is wrong—and readers will have to figure out the truth from the lies!





GIVE & TAKE

Need some help sorting through the stacks of comic books on the stands each month as you search for something worth reading? Well, let *CSN* eliminate the chaff from the wheat for you! Each month, Cliff (in plain type) and Brett *(in italic type)* sort through stacks of upcoming releases in search of those titles that deserve some extra attention. If you're looking for killer reviews of bad books, we advise that you look elsewhere; we'd rather give the column inches to books that deserve praise or extra attention instead of tying up space with reviews that skewer disappointing comics.

Publishers interested in having their books considered for review in this column should send advance xeroxes to ***CSN Give & Take,*** 2770 Carillon Crossing, Marietta GA 30066. We'd prefer to receive copies at least thirty days prior to the book's release.

At the end of the reviews, we also offer a one to five star rating for each title, with both Cliff's and Brett's ratings listed. Since we make a point to devote space only to books that deserve the attention, this rating offers readers a handy means to weigh the merits of each title. Here's the scale:

★	Your comics dollar is best spent else where
★★	Entertaining material that's worth the cover price
★★★	Good stuff that deserves a close look
★★★★	Primo reading; don't pass it up
★★★★★	You don't find comics better than this; *creme de la creme*

What IS comics?
In Understanding Comics, I used Eisner's term "Sequential Art" as my basic definition --
Comics
Not Comics
-- then offered an expanded, more clinical one to close off any semantic loopholes.
Comics: Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence.
REINVENTING COMICS
THE S.H.O.P.
MYSTIC 1
AND WHY DOES MY HAND FEEL SO...
...STRANGE?
THIS ISN'T SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN, IS IT?
SOME-THING'S WRONG.
PARDON ME, LET ME THROUGH...
EXCUSE ME, I THINK...
...I THINK MAYBE I'D BETTER GET SOME AIR...
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE RITE?
AHH!
OUT OF MY WAY! I HAVE TO GET...
NAROTH'S NAME, WHAT IS SHE RAVING ABOUT?
...OUTSIDE...

A few years ago, Scott McCloud triggered numerous discussions of the comics medium with his seminal work ***Understanding Comics.*** Whether fans agreed or disagreed with McCloud's conclusions on how comics worked and what made comics an art form, they were forced to look at comics differently, to deduce how the medium worked for them—and for that, McCloud deserves a great deal of credit.

Now McCloud has returned with a companion volume, ***Reinventing Comics;*** this time, he splits his attention between comics' past, comics' present, and comics' future—with the digital future taking up a large portion of the last half of the book.

McCloud begins with a discussion of many of the issues that have dominated comics in the past twenty years: comics as art, creator rights, public perception, diversity of genre, gender balance, minority representation, etc. Here, McCloud is more the historian than the innovator; he summarizes where the field has been and what has happened in recent times—and he casts the superhero genre in a rather harsh light. Do I agree with all of his views? Of course not—and I suspect that's the point of the book: to get readers thinking about their own perceptions of comics.

I agree with you in disagreeing with McCloud. In fact, there were several points that he tried to make that not only fell a little flat with me, but actually angered me to an extent. On that hand, I will give him high marks for being able to invoke such a powerful reaction—but I'm not sure if that was his goal. In fact, the book, especially the first third, seemed to be very, very bitter in its content. It almost seemed to be McCloud's way of saying "these are the good comics, stop reading all of those other pieces of drek." He makes a point of the comics becoming "an industry based on consumers' genuine enjoyment, rather than on short-term exploitation, inbreeding and second guessing." I didn't realized that there was only one form of "genuine enjoyment." Sorry, I don't agree.

I didn't react as strongly as you did, but as I implied earlier, I felt his dismissal of the superhero genre was a little extreme. At the same time, I do think he role as a commentator/analyst is to get readers talking about his ideas, and that's what we're doing.

I also took some offense to his implication of the gaming industry as a lesser form of entertainment than comics. Sure, he might not like it, but that's no reason to slam it. If I seem to be ranting a bit on this, it's because I am. ***Reinventing Comics*** *got to me, and I don't have two hundred pages to argue with Scott McCloud. I try to give my opinion on comics every time I write something for CSN, and I truly enjoy them. But I understand fully when someone reads one of my views and disagrees with me—just like I disagree with McCloud.*

While your disagreements seem to center on the first segment of the book, I disagree even more with his view of the digital future of comics; in spite of those many people who prophesy the forthcoming all-digital comics age where illustrated entertainment is transmitted along the 'net to waiting fans, I see this field as far more rooted in the printed form. Superior image quality, convenience, ease of use—all of these slant in favor of printed comics. However, I'll confess that McCloud makes some thought-provoking points about digital comics and the improved link between creator and fan... points I hadn't considered from this perspective.

All in all, ***Reinventing Comics*** doesn't try to be the same sort of book its predecessor was; this time around, McCloud is more concerned about the growth and development of the medium in the 21st Century. And agree with him or not, you'll find that his ideas generate a great deal of contemplation and debate—and that's important in itself.

REINVENTING COMICS
Cliff: ★★★★
Brett: ★★★

You might have heard a bit about the upcoming line of comics from CrossGen. A new company hoping to make a big splash, using some older techniques and ideas with new talent and creators. The question remaining was a simple one: how good are the books?

One of the new titles from CrossGen is ***Mystic****, the story of a world where magic is not only real, but a natural part of the everyday world. Cars fly using magic, clubs have magicians for the purpose of entertainment, and the society looks to the most powerful mages of the land for guidance and security. Of course, not everyone likes magic, and that is where we are introduced to Giselle Villard, the younger sister of, Genevieve, the woman slated to become the newest member of the guild masters—but thins don't always work out the way that you think. It seems that some higher powers have plans for Giselle, and in a freak accident she is given the magical powers of all of the different guild masters for her own, thus becoming the world's most powerful mage, whether she wants it or not.*

The sister relationship is an entertaining aspect of this series; the sibling resentment turns sibling rivalry quite quickly, which is unexpected, since

GIVE & TAKE

WE FOUND FLOYD IN THE LOBBY HARANGUING ONE OF THE BOUNCERS.
THERE HE IS!
ANOTHER THING, HITLER WAS JEWISH! IT'S A FACT.
SLURP
LET'S GO, FLOYD. THE SECOND SET WILL BE STARTING IN A FEW MINUTES.
IT'S SO LOUD IN THERE. I'D RATHER BE OUT HERE.
YOU'RE ANNOYING THE LOCALS. C'MON BACK AND ANNOY YOUR FRIENDS FOR AWHILE.

CONFESSIONS OF A CEREAL EATER

these sisters seemed to have nothing in common with one another until the moment when the magic takes an unexpected left turn.

Writer Ron Marz has crafted a well told tale that features likeable characters in the type of situations that tend to breed heroes. Giselle may not like magic, but she isn't a bad person. Oh sure, she likes to be the center of attention, and she has a bad reputation among those that revere magic, but she is gentle and caring, even to the point of being there for her sister at her grand moment of being accepted into the guild (if it had gone correctly...). In short, she has all of the qualities that make for a strong lead character in traditional comics.

That's great with me; I'm tired of bad girls, I'm tired of mystical heroines with an affinity for sharp objects and a penchant for bloodshed, I'm tired of female antiheroes. It's nice to meet a magical heroine who, for her minor faults, is *likeable*. In this regard, ***Mystic*** does have similarities to a superhero comic: the main character has potentially heroic qualities, even if she is immature enough that she's not fully aware of those qualities herself.

That's actually the key to this book (and the rest of the CrossGen line), it tries to capture the flavor of traditional superhero comics, and what's more, it does an admirable job.

If there is any weakness to ***Mystic****, it is the fact that all of the characters are quickly identifiable. You can spot the hero, the supporting cast, and the mysterious stranger before it becomes confirmed. Nevertheless, it is well crafted. The story is easy to follow, and it introduces you to not only the world, but the cast of characters in the first issue.*

And to be fair, I should point out that the review copy we've read is a few pages shorter than the finished version you'll find on the stands in early June.

The art for the series is by Brandon Peterson and John Dell, both veterans of the comic battlefield. Their skills show in this comic, as it has the slick polish and skilled storytelling of somebody that knows what they are doing. The art is very solid, if not a step or two above that level.

Back to the question that was posed at the beginning of this review: are the books any good? The answer is yes. While this review focused on what both Cliff and I felt was the best of the CrossGen titles, the entire series is off to a very solid start.

And I should point out that we read them in the worst possible manner: in one sitting, one after another, where the common theme of a power-granting sigil becomes all too prominent in these stories. Even with this intentional similarity, the books have a distinctive flavor that makes each of them enjoyable. I know my second favorite was ***Meridian***, a well-crafted fantasy-adventure that should appeal to anyone who's ever enjoyed a Linda Medley comic or a grand fantasy novel.

For me, ***Scion*** *was the second-best. I enjoyed its adventure aspect—and it couldn't have arrived at a better time than on the heels of Gladiator's film success, what with its gladiatorial angle in the first issue.*

All of the books are entertaining and well crafted, and I'm sure that everyone will find their personal favorite from the line. Now, whether or not the books are able to hold this quality...well, ask me again in about two years, but I have a feeling that there's going to be a good answer for some time to come.

MYSTIC

Cliff: ★★★
Brett: ★★★

Superheroes and politics. With a few exceptions, comics have glossed over the natural friction that would inevitably occur between the heroes and the politicians if superheroes really existed. Certainly, the problems have been addressed from time to time... but for the most part, stories that deal with the uncomfortable interrelationship between the two seem constructed as an expeditious method of negating the problematic interrelationship.

That's not the approach that David Yurkovich takes with ***the s.h.o.p.***, his graphic novel that picks up where his old superhero series ***Threshold*** left off.

How does a politician react to the property damage and loss of life inherent in superhero-supervillain battles? How do those in power politically deal with those who possess the power physically? The answer to that question plays a major role in this story.

"With great power comes great responsibility." Remember that old adage? That's another factor of ***the s.h.o.p.*** How do superheroes deal with the awareness of what they're doing to civilians, to their enemies, to one another... and to themselves? Yurkovich brings the responsibility of superheroism to light in a way that few others have; his world, populated with bizarre characters possessing sometimes absurd powers, seems much closer to our world than anything you'll find in most more traditional superhero comics.

I've always been a fan of David Yurkovich's work; I've enjoyed him at his most surreal, but I'm particularly pleased with ***the s.h.o.p.*** because it's accessible to those who have never ventured into Yurkovich's world before. It's philosophically subversive: readers will find the superhero aspects of the story so familiar that they won't realize immediately that they're being presented with a distinctive, and sometimes disturbing, view of superheroes and their interrelationships with one another and with the mundane world.

This is the best work that Yurkovich has produced to date. It seems like he gets a little better all of the time, and I found his departure from the more surreal work that he tends to explore quite refreshing. Yurkovich has produced a top-notch story about superheroes in a very real world, and it still has the little flares that give it a nice humor edge.

The s.h.o.p. deserves a place in your collection alongside other thought-provoking revisionist superhero works; it will make you think much more about the people—and the motivations—behind the masks.

THE S.H.O.P.

Cliff: ★★★★
Brett: ★★★★

To be honest, I'm surprised that I'm getting to review this book. Not because I had bad feelings about the quality of the book, or questioned whether or not the title would see the light of day, but because I would have put money on Cliff reviewing this comic with glee.

A couple of years back, Cliff and I reviewed the graphic novel edition of ***Confessions of a Cereal Eater****, which both of us enjoyed a great deal. Now, that series is being turned into a regular comic that continues the autobiographical tales of Rob Maisch with the aid of a bevy of talented artists. Perhaps the reason why Cliff skipped over this book was because he already*

GIVE & TAKE

I'M STILL BRUCE, ANGELA. IN THIS CONFIGURATION I GET TO RETAIN MY IDENTITY AND MY CONTROL OVER THE HULK'S POWER. ALL OF MY MEMORIES --MY PERSONALITY --MY INTELLECT... THEY ALL REMAIN WITH ME.
I APOLOGIZE FOR DUCKING OUT OF THE FESTIVITIES WHEN WE ARRIVED-- I WANTED TO GET A JUMP ON SOME WORK THAT I JUST UNFINISHED WHEN I WAS LAST HERE.
YEAH...LOOK, NOT TO BE FUNNY OR ANYTHING, BUT WHICH VERSION OF YOU GETS THE FASHION SENSE? YOU LOOK LIKE A REFUGEE FROM A DURAN DURAN VIDEO.
INCREDIBLE HULK 16

WOW!
THAT MASK HAS GOT SOME KINDA MOJO IN IMPLANTED IT
IT'S LIKE IT TAPS INTO THE UNCONSCIOUS, YOU KNOW, AND UNLEASHES THE MAN-HE EGO OF A PERSON AND GIVES 'EM SUPER POWERS WITHIN... YOU THINK THAT'S HOW IT WORKS, IMPLANT-IT?
HAHAHA!
WHO CARES HOW IT WORKS? IT WORKS!
SNACK, THAT WAS GREAT! THE BEST THING ALL NIGHT! THIS MASK OR YOURS MAKING BIG PLANS FOR US!
SO NOW I'LL BET THAT RAISE AND PLAY SOME FOOTBALL, AND YOU AND ME CAN BE PARTNERS!
PARTNERS?
OH...
PARTNERS, HAHAAH! I CAN SEE US ALL OVER THE NEWS! "JOKER, SNACK AND CO." YOU AND ME, BOSS BY SIDE! COMMANDERS! PUTTY-PUTTY ALL THE WAY!
JOKER MASK 1

HELLO. WHAT'S THIS?
WHAT DO YOU SEE?
UNLESS I'M BADLY MISTAKEN--
--I BELIEVE WE'VE JUST IDENTIFIED OUR PREVIOUSLY UNIDENTIFIED MALIGNANT POWER.
WERE OKAY. IT'S A GOBLIN. A FULL-GROWN ADULT--
--BUT NOTHING I CAN'T EASILY HANDLE WITH A COUPLE OF SPELLS.
A STRENGTH SPELL AND PERSONAL ARMOR SPELL-- OUGHT TO DO IT.
I'M NOT SO SURE.
MAYBE YOU SHOULD HANG BACK HERE AND ZAP HA FROM A SAFE DISTANCE.
COME ON CORNELIUS. IT'S JUST A GOBLIN, THE PERFECT OPPONENT FOR A LITTLE HAND-TO-HAND WORKOUT.
COWABUNGA!
OR SOME OTHER SUITABLE BATTLE-CRY.
NUCKZ
STRANGE HEROES

reviewed the graphic novel, or maybe its because this time out the story is set firmly in the seventies—the era that I grew up in instead of Cliff's sixties of youth.

Actually, there's another reason... and it has to do with the fact that one of the stories has a strongly pro-alcohol abuse angle that I don't condone or enjoy, having seen too many students whose lives were disrupted or destroyed because of alcohol abuse I did enjoy the other stories well enough, but this is a case where the subject matter left a negative first impression.

And before you consign me to a nursing home, remember—I was in college in the 1970s, not the 1960s!

The best story in the issue is a tale that has the group of friends heading out to see Bob Seger in concert, a tale called "Daniel's Den." The story doesn't focus on any one clear plot or revelation, but brings out a true feeling of friendship that is far too often lost by those that "grow up and move into the real world." This is a story about kids with flaws and problems who just don't care about them and enjoy hanging out and having fun with each other. What a true delight.

I have never been a huge fan of autobiographical tales. In fact, books like ***American Splendor*** *tend to bore me to no end, as they seem to be nothing more than a pretentious story by a person who thinks very highly of himself and his life. That isn't the case here. There is nothing pretentious about Maisch's work. He is a creators that is capturing the magic of a time gone by. Is it totally accurate? Who cares. It's a great story, with great characters.*

I think I enjoyed the original graphic novel more because its emphasis on nostalgic universality of experience rather than a bit of juvenile tawdriness. I'll also have to admit that this may be a particularly strong bias on my part regarding this one story that interferes with my enjoyment of the book; I don't expect everyone to share my opinions here.

In many ways, I enjoyed the comic version of ***Confession of a Cereal Eater*** *more than the graphic novel. There are three stories in the book, and two out of three are great. The middle one didn't click with me on all levels—being a non-drinker—but hey, as the song from the seventies tells us, two out of three ain't bad.*

CONFESSIONS OF A CEREAL EATER
Cliff: ★★
Brett: ★★★★

In case you haven't noticed, ***The Incredible Hulk*** has gotten good again.

Obviously, there were a lot of you who—like me—gave up on the Hulk once Marvel ended the superlative Peter David run on the series and foisted on us the "Hulk-smash" interpretation of the man-monster once again. Obviously time had blurred memory so sufficiently that Marvel forgot how bored fans had become with that version of the Hulk many years before.

Marvel's remedied that mistake, though, by bringing Paul Jenkins on board as writer and allowing him the freedom to make the Hulk interesting once more. And boy, has he!

Remember the intelligent Hulk, the melding of Bruce Banner's mind and the Hulk's body? He's back—sort of. The only thing is, this isn't really Bruce Banner at all. Paul Jenkins has added a new twist to the story, revealing that there's much more to this seeming amalgam than meets the eye.

Remember Thunderbolt Ross? He's no longer the most fanatical Hulk hater in the Marvel Universe. He's been eclipsed by General Ryker, a man so amoral and subversive that he unleashed Agent Orange on his own troops as an experiment... and he may have been involved in the coup that ended President Kennedy's life.

Remember Doc Samson, the consummate psychologist? Well, it turns out that he's not beyond a little experimentation with his patients, either...

I didn't care for the new take on Doc Samson as much as you did. I liked the altruistic Samson of old, but that's really a minor complaint to an otherwise entertaining comic. It might not be the Peter David era, but it is easily the best thing Marvel has produced since.

But I'm not convinced that this Samson isn't altruistic; he *is* trying to help Bruce Banner balance two disparate personalities, and he does succeed in that regard. Even so, I have to wonder if, after all his failures in dealing with the Hulk, Samson might not be willing to experiment a bit more.

If you abandoned the ***Hulk*** during its bad period, you really owe it to yourself to come back again. Jenkins' take on the greenskinned goliath is every bit as fascinating as Peter David's—and his plots are strong enough to have you eagerly awaiting the next issue to see what happens.

It's true—Hulk a smash!

INCREDIBLE HULK #16
Cliff: ★★★★
Brett: ★★★

You should expect some lunacy from a comic that features two crazy characters, but in a comic that has two crazy characters in one?...

The ***Joker/Mask*** *crossover title from Dark Horse and DC is a bit of a surprise. I found the story focusing on the Joker and Harley Quinn to have that nice touch of black humor you expect from any Mask tale, but amplified by the interaction between Harley and her Puddin'. There is even a nice tone of humor to the fact that the Joker develops a quicker sense of humor than before. In this incarnation, he doesn't seem to be the insane killer—even though it remains quite clear that he is—but more of a comic relief style character. That is probably enough to anger some Bat-fans out there, and even some non-hardcore fans, but it worked for me.*

Oh, it works for me, too! While I applaud what Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams did to recast the Joker as one of the most malevolent adversaries in the DC Universe, there was a long time there when the Joker was much more a clown-criminal than a maniacal murderer. I started reading ***Batman*** during those Jack Schiff days, and I feel right at home with this version of the Joker.

Part of the reason that I liked it, and thought that the portrayal worked, was due to the cartoony art stylings of Ramon Bachs and Howard Shum. I thought that this book needed the over-the-top stylings used in the comic. It reminded me of an exaggerated version of the animated style, which is exactly what this book tries to be: a cartoon come to comics.

While it's not my favorite art style, I'll concur that for this story, it seems particularly appropriate. This "kinder-gentler" Joker, combined with the exaggerated aspect of the Mask itself, does make a more animation style of art seem apropos.

Best of all, it's a *fun* comic. No powerful message, no noirish undertones, no major suspense—just high-concept entertainment. And there's

GIVE&TAKE

always room for that in comics.

JOKER/MASK #1
Cliff: ★★
Brett: ★★★

Leland Myrick first caught my attention with ***Sweet***, his series about love and loss set against a variety of backdrops. Now he's back with a new series, ***School Girls***, that uses a much more common real-world setting to explore themes of love—both romantic and family.

The title may mislead readers into expecting a light-hearted manga-like book about adolescents; what you'll find in these pages is something much more complicated, and much more compelling. Sure, there are light-hearted moments here—but they're counterpoised against moments of surprising pathos and bleakness. The first-person break-the-invisible-wall narrative may seem humorous, but this isn't a silly book.

Oh, it isn't silly at all. This is a warm book. It has so many good qualities that they are hard to list, but one of the most impressive is his portrayal of the lead character, Shelly.

For me, the scenes with Shelly's grandparents were a powerful counterpoint to Shelly's story, adding impact to the book while giving the book an extra sense of reality and depth.

What Myrick is trying to do here is to truly make us see the world through the eyes of Shelly, the star of ***School Girls***. Some of her problems may seem insignificant to us, but they're not insignificant to her. Myrick makes Shelly a likeable, complex, well-balanced character; as we get to know her, we care about what happens to her.

Myrick has hooked up with artist Mark Dos Santos for this series, and the chemistry is great. Dos Santos has a delightfully confident style, a perfect blending of realism and animation-style simplicity that brings the story to life on the page. He has a real strength for character; his linework gives each of the players in this story a visual personality that accents Myrick's narrative.

Dos Santos is a real find. He has the talent to go very far in the comic industry, creating as much attention for himself as he wants. He is a wonderful artist.

School Girls is a subtle, character-driven story that seems to draw more influence from Thornton Wilder and Sherwood Anderson than it does from any comics creator. If you thought that comics had to be larger-than-life in order to be effective, read this book and see how wrong you were.

SCHOOL GIRLS #1
Cliff: ★★★
Brett: ★★★★

It's a shame that Bill Willingham doesn't do more work. He just finished ***Proposition Player****, which was a fun title from Vertigo, and now he is launching into* ***Strange Heroes****, his new comic from Lone Star Press. This comic features two different stories, both written by Willingham and drawn by different artists. The first is called Otherland, and is about a young woman who has been transported to a world-inside-our-world—i.e. The Savage Land, Pretoria, that world that The Warlord lived in, etc.—where she is discovering being a fish out of water.*

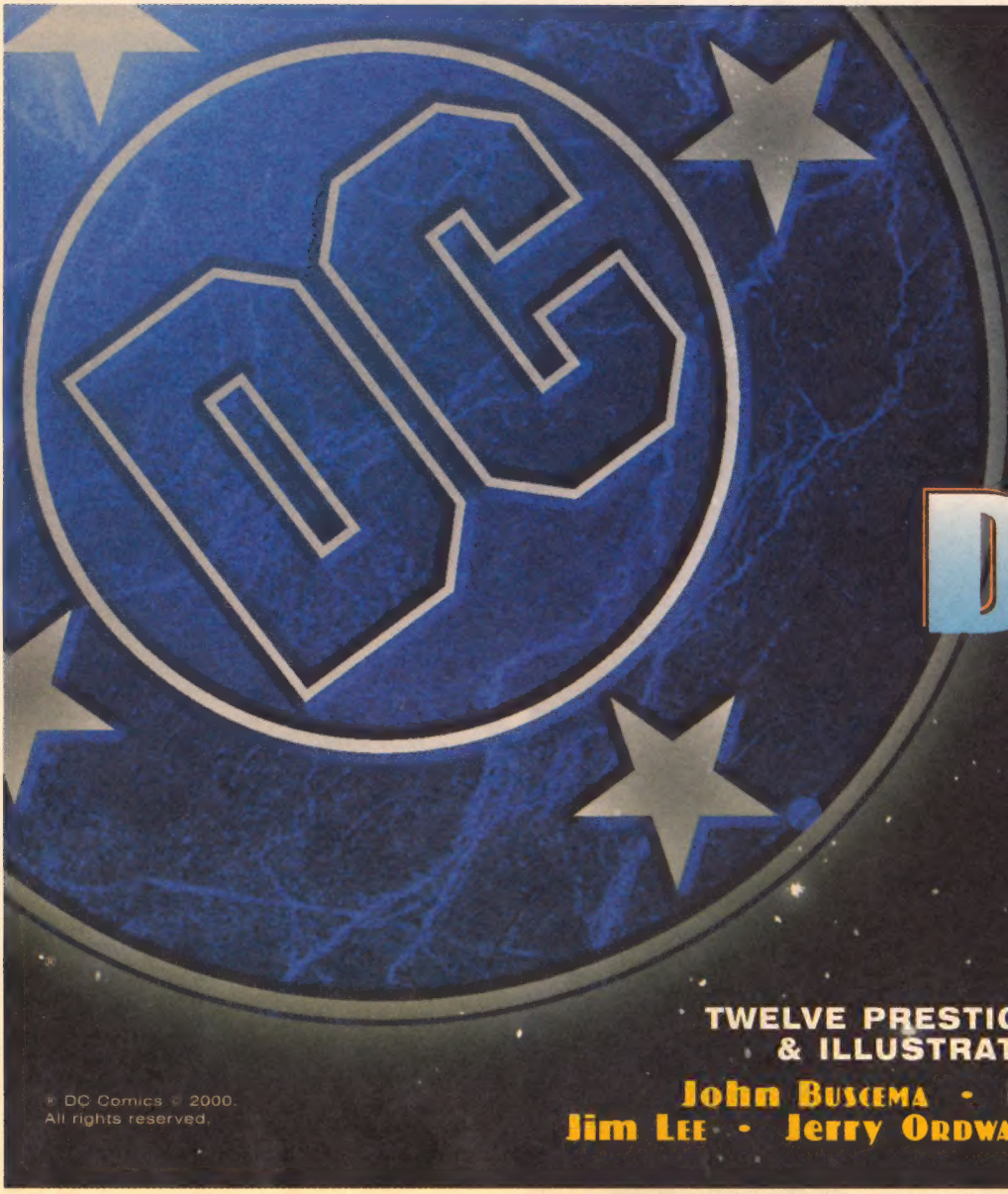
I go back much further than you to Edgar Rice Burroughs when I think of this concept; I know that he wasn't the first, but it was Burroughs' Pellucidar that first impressed me with the "inner world" idea. After seeing much of the inner world's charm squandered in the Savage Land stories in recent years, I'm ready for someone else to offer another take on the concept. I only hope that Willingham does more with the inner world's potential; there's a lot that can be done here that is ignored by most storytellers.

The second story is about a fledgling superhero called Spellbinder. This was the more appealing tale, as it featured not only a costumed crime fighter, but also a mentor that is trying to make the kid a worthwhile hero—and to top it all off, the mentor is a cat. Cliff and I both love cats, so this is sure to be a nice sucker-punch for both of us.

True—but without the heroic sense of wonder that gives the story its charm, even the cat would be insufficient to make it worthwhile. This is a very accessible all-ages sort of story, very entertaining for fans as well as for novice readers who aren't familiar with the complexities of the superhero genre.

Both of the stories in ***Strange Heroes****, while not incredibly innovate in concept, are well executed. Willingham has a great storytelling ability, and can turn any book into something readable, and this is better than just readable. Now, if we could only talk Bill into drawing a comic...*

STRANGE HEROES
Cliff: ★★
Brett: ★★



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